



DIFFICULT DIALOGUE

Dialogue is defined as:
“two or more sides working towards a common understanding”. While Difficult Dialogues are defined as:
“... dialogue between two or more people, where at least one person experiences some level of discomfort in engaging in the topic or issue with the other people.”

(Watson and Gill, 2012)

FRAMING

As a college committed to *Transforming Lives*, we believe that engaging in difficult dialogues is key to achieving our vision leading to better (or more effective) communication and problem solving.

GOAL

The goal of the Difficult Dialogues Program at Texas A&M University is to make the campus climate more welcoming, inclusive, and safe for the free exchange of ideas and differences in perspectives that come with building a diverse and global learning community.

CEHD CRITICAL DIALOGUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORTED BY THE COMMITTEE ON DIVERSITY INITIATIVES (CoDI)

INTRODUCTION

Difficult Dialogues is a program originated by the Ford Foundation and designed to promote academic freedom and religious, cultural, and political pluralism on college and university campuses in the United States [Ford Foundation, 2005]. The Difficult Dialogues Program at Texas A&M University aims to build capacity for engaging in effective communication, encourage productive conflict management, and support a skill set for handling difficult dialogues with a focus on and learning environments (e.g intact work groups, classrooms, and units/departments).

GOAL

The goal of the Difficult Dialogues Program at Texas A&M University is to make the campus climate more welcoming, inclusive, and safe for the free exchange of ideas and differences in perspectives that come with building a diverse and global learning community. Accordingly, the Difficult Dialogues Program contributes to the three overarching goals (Accountability, Climate, and Equity) of the University Diversity Plan. In particular, the Difficult Dialogues Program contributes to the fulfillment of the Diversity Plan commitment to attend to and promote a positive and supportive climate, which fully recognizes, values, and integrates diversity in the pursuit of academic excellence.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE DIFFICULT DIALOGUES PROGRAM AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

1. To increase skill sets and preparedness of administrators, faculty, staff, and students to encounter difficult dialogues constructively both internal to their units and external to the university environment.
2. To facilitate self-awareness and recognition by individuals that their passion, fear, anger, judgment, thoughts, and mental models all impact dialogue.
3. To engage the campus community in dialogue around sensitive topics and issues.
4. To create a cadre of trained difficult dialogue (Stanley, Watson, & Gill, 2012).



TAMU ACTION 2015: EDUCATION FIRST

TAMU Action 2015: Education First is a plan that insists on bold choices about the grand challenges on which we as an institution will focus, and thus, on those we will not. The plan insists that we make **difficult** decisions about the investment of scarce new resources, and that we make even more **difficult** choices about whether we are using our current resources in a manner that is consistent with our stated plan and goals. **Education First** means that we cannot make decisions about only teaching or only research. Rather, the plan demands that we make new, original decisions and investments that will knit together the traditional elements of **Education First** and enable the innovations required to take Texas A&M to new levels of performance, productivity and impact.

AGGIES COMMIT TO LEARNING FOR A LIFE TIME

Texas A&M University faculty know that it takes a lifetime to learn. We want our students to understand that a Texas A&M University education means they commit not only to the four years that it takes to earn a baccalaureate degree, but also to learning for a lifetime, preparing to assume roles in responsible leadership and service to society. The Texas A&M Provost describes the Aggies Commit initiative as follows:

Given our rapidly changing world, students will need to learn continually throughout their lifetime, integrating new ideas and information with what they already know. We have developed our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) with the theme Aggies Commit to Learning for a Lifetime. It asks our students to make a commitment to purposefully engage in high-impact learning experiences and thoughtfully reflect on their learning experiences in order to develop the habits and skills for integrative and lifelong learning. It calls for our institution to create a culture with opportunities and support for student engagement and reflection. *Texas A&M University. 2012. Aggies Commit to Learning for a Lifetime: A Quality Enhancement Plan.* (http://provost.tamu.edu/initiatives/quality-enhancement-plan/TAMUQEPforWEB_021712.pdf)

It is a truism that making difficult decisions and difficult choices and creating a culture with opportunities and support for students, faculty and staff engagement and reflection requires the nurturing of difficult dialogues hence the need for the Difficult Dialogues Program not only in the College of Education and Human Development, but the entire university community and beyond.

BENEFITS OF THE DIFFICULT DIALOGUES PROGRAM

During the *CEHD 2014 Conference: A Dialogue on Climate, Inclusion and Respect*, held on March 6, 2014 at TAMU and attended by over 350 participants, one of the keynote presenters Provost Watson observed that power refers to the amount of energy expended in a given amount of time. And that true power does not come from a title. To be successful; in our work, we need to have the ability to sustain the energy that we expend. Experiences that help us understand our privileges will help us exercise our power, especially on behalf others who may lack privilege in a particular area.

Panel session speaker Dr. Worthington observed that effective leaders had three major characteristics; 1) They have a healthy understanding of their power (2) They help others get through a difficult dialogue, and (3) They should be training to engage in difficult dialogues. Dr. Laurie Priest, another keynote speaker, observed that to achieve our vision and mission, we must build communication based on dialogue. She observed further that dialogue suggests meaning and flow. That dialogue forces us to be better communicators and enhances us. In addition, our relationships are defined by our conversations with others.

Dr. Priest outlined the following as the benefits of dialogue:

1. Recognizes that everyone carries with them a piece of the truth. To get people to speak their voice is one of the greatest challenges in an organization.
2. Enables everyone to be a part of the solution. It can be a win-win. There does not have to be winners and losers.



CEHD CRITICAL DIALOGUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION (CDHE) COMMITTEE

The CEHD Critical Dialogues in Higher Education (CDHE) committee is co-chaired by Dr. Fred M. Nafukho and Crystal Vinal. CDHE is sponsored by the Office of Organization Development and Diversity Initiatives (ODDI) and supported by the CEHD Committee on Diversity Initiatives (CoDI). The overarching goals of CEHD, aligned with the College's climate and diversity goals, are to build individual and organizational capacity by offering:

1. *TAMU Difficult Dialogue Modules* (4 3-hour modules) to faculty, staff, administrators and students within CEHD.
2. *CEHD Quarterly Dialogue Opportunities* to CEHD faculty and staff. Based upon CEHD Climate Survey results, dialogue topics will be determined and a 1 1/2 hour dialogue will occur related to the topic. The dialogue opportunity format is: prior to dialogue reading or video, lunch provided, ground rules established and committed to, facilitated dialogue circle to discuss climate and diversity topic.
3. The *Difficult Dialogue Summer Institute* (DDSI) – described throughout the remainder of this document.
4. Evidence and Benchmark the impact of items 1-3.

Charge to Committee – reflect, and gather inputs, on the College community and its thinking related to the establishment of a *CEHD Difficult Dialogues Summer Institute* (DDSI) whose goals are to: (1) Create opportunities to build capacity within the college to impact climate and culture positively (2) Build individual capacity (3) Build departmental and college capacity in the area of difficult dialogues, (4) determine the value added of creating an outreach opportunity to the University, and (5) determine the need and value added of creating a national presence for the institute.

Catalysts for CDHE Program meeting – (1) desire to build infrastructure to enhance difficult dialogues among college administrators, faculty, staff and student leaders.

CEHD Difficult Dialogues Summer Institute Goal – Create opportunities to build capacity within the college to impact climate and culture positively through difficult dialogues.

*“For difficult dialogues to take place, the necessary condition is to create a **safe space** while the sufficient condition is to create a **courageous space** that can allow both meaning and flow to take place. Courageous spaces are where people can reveal their authentic self.”*

15 FACTOR DIALOGUE MODEL

The Texas A&M University and CEHD Difficult Dialogues Program is grounded in a *15 factor Dialogue Model* adapted by Watson and Gill (2012) and based on national dialogue research and their experiences with the design and launch of the first Difficult Dialogues Program at Texas A&M University in collaboration with the Office of the Vice President and Associate Provost for Diversity. The figure below shows the fifteen factor Dialogue Model that will be utilized by the CEHD Difficult Dialogues Summer Institute.





NEXT STEPS

Having sought input from the CoDI membership, selecting a DDSI Committee and receiving support from the Vice President for Diversity (May 2014) CEHD Dean's Council (July 1, 2014), the following actions are occurring:

- Dr. Nancy Watson, Assistant Dean for Organizational Development and Diversity initiatives, College of Education and Human Development and Director of DDP and DDSI, in collaboration with Nafukho and Vinal (DDSI Co-chairs), will start developing the DDSI curriculum
- Develop a 4-days intensive curriculum for the DDSI
- Develop an online application procedure for CEHD DDSI applicants (see sample attached)
- Consult with Dr. Beverly Irby, Director of Educational Leadership Research Center to discuss the issue of ELRC hosting the DDSI
- Call for the Difficult Dialogues Summer Institute Planning Committee Meeting. The following members will be attending the meeting: Nancy Watson, Fred Nafukho, Crystal Vinal, Ann Gundy, Dawn Parker, Susan Ward, and Nancy Hutchins
- Send out a call for applications for administrators, faculty, and staff to participate in the DDSI
- From the applicants, select a small class of twenty participants (4 members from each department and deans office; each represented with administrators/leader, members of staff and faculty).
- Contact department heads to discuss providing \$500 professional development stipends to members selected to participate in the DDSI 2015 training (each department contributes \$3000 X 4 =12,000, Dean's office \$5000) = 17,000.
- Offer initial DDSI opportunities to members of the college, then the university community, and later consider offering DDSI nationally and internationally.
- Create a website for CEHD CDHE and link to VPD website and ELRC website

ONLINE APPLICATION FOR TAMU CEHD DIFFICULT DIALOGUE SUMMER INSTITUTE

General Information on Applicant Submission

1. Current Job Title and Responsibilities (1/2 page):
2. Professional Experience (½ page maximum):
3. Why are you interested in the Difficult Dialogues Summer Institute Leadership and Professional Development (½ page maximum)

Professional Challenge Statement

What do you believe are the major challenges facing your unit? (One page)

Organization and Team Characteristics

1. What was your rationale for choosing the particular members of your units/department's team?
2. What roles do you envision each member playing in your unit/department's dialogue and leadership efforts?
3. What are the two most important challenges your department/unit faces? (1/2 page)

Anticipated Contribution Statement

Briefly explain how your team experiences will be valuable to the TAMU CEHD Difficult Dialogues Summer Institute.

*Supported and endorsed by TAMU Vice President for Diversity, June 2014
Approved by Dean's Council, August 2014*